

ESTABLISHMENT OF RUSSELL CAVE

In 1951, a crew from the Tennessee Valley Authority was surveying land for power lines in Doran's Cove located in the Northeast corner of Alabama. One crew member, Paul H. Brown, was told about projectile points that were found along the route. Because Brown was an amateur archaeologist and a member of the Chattanooga Chapter of the Tennessee Archaeological Society, the crew felt that he would be interested in their discovery. Looking at a map of the area, Brown noticed a cave situated back into Montague Mountain close to where the points were found. He thought if the cave was habitable then it would be a good place to look for projectile points and other artifacts. However this cave was on private property owned by a Mr. Oscar Ridley.

In 1953, Oscar Ridley, who owned the land that included the cave, signed an agreement authorizing archaeological excavations there. Paul Brown was joined by Charles Peacock, LeBaron Pahmeyer and J.B. Graham; all amateur archeologists. A large amount of artifacts were found over two years of excavations that led to the recognition of an important site now known as Russell Cave. The contents of their excavations were brought to the attention of Dr. Matthew W. Stirling, Director of the Smithsonian Institute's Bureau of American Ethnology. Since National Geographic assisted Dr. Stirling on previous projects he thought that they would be interested in Russell Cave.

On September 13, 1956, National Geographic Society purchased 310 acres of farm land, including the cave shelter, from Oscar Ridley. Unfortunately, Smithsonian funds were not available for excavations. National Geographic wanted to preserve the cave shelter for scientific study, so they funded the excavation. Dr. Stirling requested Carl Miller of the Smithsonian Institute to lead the excavations in Russell Cave for two years. During this time, several thousand artifacts were found ranging from projectile points to human burials. Projectile points found here revealed prehistoric people lived at Russell Cave dating back approximately 10,000 years.

In 1958, National Geographic Society donated the land to the American people. Russell Cave National Monument was established by Presidential Proclamation on May 11, 1961 by John F. Kennedy.